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ABSTRACT

The priorities to be considered in implementing state support for teacher centers are examined. New legislation in some states requires that state boards of education actively support teacher centers. The following areas of activity are suggested as focal points to guide state education departments in complying with legislative mandates: (1) technical assistance to teacher centers; (2) dissemination of information on educational resources; (3) assessment of needs; (4) development of programs and teacher center networks; and (5) validation and evaluation of established programs. (JD)

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AN EXPLORATORY EXPOSITION ON THE ROLE OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN THE TEACHER CENTER MOVEMENT

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"The beauty of teaching centers is that rather than promoting new "fads" in education, they generally are directed and consolidating the best efforts that educators have been building and wrestling with for many years."

Dr. Allen Schmeider
Director
Teacher Center Program
U.S.O.E.

Dr. Sam Yarger
Syracuse University

Introduction

A teacher center may be described as a place, changing location, or mechanism designed to facilitate the development of programs to improve classroom instruction. Participants are encouraged to share ideas, knowledge, skills, and successes. Teacher centers may address the needs of individuals as well as the collectively identified systemwide needs.

The major teacher center activity in the United States has taken place in the last decade. Several states have actively supported teacher centers to some degree. In 1976 Congress passed the new law, Teacher Centers' Program, P.L. 94-482. Under this law, states are required to assume a much more active role in the development of teacher centers.

Leadership

It is imperative that state departments of education assume a strong leadership role in the development of teacher centers. There is a direct relationship between the attainment of quality classroom instruction and the provision of effective, continuous, professional development programs. Teacher centers have the potential of becoming extremely affective mechanisms for the provision of quality professional development programs. State departments of education are uniquely designed to foster collaborative efforts between the various interest groups concerned with the development of teacher centers. The enhancement of teacher directed, professional development programs could result through collaborative activities between state departments of education, teachers' organizations, local education agencies, and institutions of higher education.

In order to foster the leadership potential of the state department of education, a thorough knowledge of national events which impact on the teacher center program is essential. It is equally important for state departments of education to be knowledgeable about teacher center activities within their respective states.

TEACHER CENTER PROGRAM, PUBLIC LAW 94-482

Proposal Review, Technical Assistance, Dissemination

The rules and regulations for Public Law 94-482, Section 532, "Teacher Center Program," requires state departments of education to review proposals, provide technical assistance and disseminate information concerning exemplary teacher center activities.

Review of Proposals

The review process selected by state education agencies must provide for the full participation of various interest groups within the educational community. The establishment of a statewide teacher center advisory council is one method of providing such equitable participation. The teacher center policy board presents a good model for the establishment of a statewide advisory council. The statewide council could be formed with a majority of K-12 level teachers, representatives from teachers' professional organizations and institutions of higher education. The precise function of the advisory council in the review process would be determined by the state agency in collaboration with the council. It is paramount that the state agency establish clear, concise evaluative criteria upon which the selection of proposals are based. These criteria should be set forth prior to the actual submission of proposals.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is a strategy designed to effectively provide knowledge and resources when and where needed. State education agencies have developed various models to accomplish this very important task. The success or failure of any type of program could rest with this single factor. Leadership skills, specialized knowledge and the involvement of key people is vital to the success of any technical assistance model. Three different models for the provisions of technical assistance are briefly presented in this paper.

1. The Direct Technical Assistance Model

   The most effective method of providing technical assistance in small states or states with a small number of consolidated school districts could be the direct technical assistance model. Initial as well as follow-up technical assistance is provided by the SEA teacher center staff.

2. Technical Assistance Provided by Institutions of Higher Education

   In this model the SEA would select and provide technical assistance to personnel from various institutions of higher education. The personnel from the institutions of higher education would provide technical assistance to local agencies and other institutions of higher education.

3. The Broker Design Model

The "Broker Design Model" involves the provision of technical assistance by the SEA to cooperating consultants recruited from throughout the state. Cooperating consultants may be K-12 level teachers, various other types of school personnel, teacher center personnel, and personnel from institutions of higher education. The cooperating consultant would provide technical assistance to local education agencies and institutions of higher education.

Technical assistance is a coordinated strategy utilized by the national as well as state offices of education. Its principal goal to provide information, skills and support is dependent upon effective two-way communication systems which facilitate the skillful transfer of information and resources by the utilization of resource people.

Dissemination

The successful dissemination of information concerning exemplary teacher centers is a vital component of the teacher center program. The dissemination process should be based on the evaluation and validation of teacher center programs. State education agencies should develop dissemination plans, procedures and strategies prior to the establishment of teacher centers. The dissemination model selected depends on the resources available for that purpose in each state. Some important factors which apply to any good dissemination model may include the following features:

-- The development of good contact people in the mass media field.
-- The identification of appropriate audiences for dissemination.
-- The careful selection of dissemination materials.
-- The predetermination of dissemination purposes (i.e., communication or diffusion).

Dissemination implemented with communication as the primary focus seeks to create widespread knowledge of a program. This type of dissemination is valuable when there is a need to keep various audiences apprised of the progress of a specific program.

Dissemination designed for purposes of diffusion which may result in adoption/adaption of validated practices is intended to prevent unnecessary duplication of money, time and energy. This dissemination process may be graphically described as follows:

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Evaluation

Validation

Diffusion

Adoption/Adaption

State education agencies may, through good process and product evaluation procedures, establish validation criteria. Exemplary teacher centers may, after completing the validation process, share their successful practices through adoption/adaption procedures.

Needs Assessment

The state education agency must be concerned with needs assessment at the statewide level as well as with encouraging local communities to participate in locally oriented needs assessment. In both situations, certain procedures ought to be undertaken. These procedures are outlined in the following chart.

Assess Needs

Prioritize Needs

Develop Program Objectives

Implement Objectives

Evaluate

Statewide Professional Development

The assessment of needs is an essential step prior to the establishment of teacher centers. This assessment process may be conducted in either a formal or informal fashion. Teachers' professional organizations, local education agencies and institutions of higher education may be requested to provide information. If time and resources are available, a state education agency may decide to conduct a formal assessment of inservice needs.

Local education agencies are ideally designed to assess the inservice needs on a district, departmental or individual basis. Teacher center programs can be designed to address needs at all three levels.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the essential factor for the successful validation and dissemination of exemplary teacher center programs. Process, as well as product evaluation, is essential in determining whether or not a program is producing the desired results as outlined by the program objectives.

State education agencies should set in motion procedures which involve teacher centers in evaluation of self-determined goals and objectives. Additionally, centers must be evaluated in terms of the long-range effect of their activities on the improvement of classroom instruction.

Worthwile evaluation models take a great deal of time and effort. However, the information gained from appropriate evaluation models is extremely important in making decisions. It is vital that teacher centers provide state education agencies with valid evaluation data.

Process evaluation which is utilized in determining program direction, product evaluation which is utilized to determine the quality of a program and evaluation utilized to measure the cost/benefit of a program are equally important features of the total evaluation process. State education agencies should establish effective process and product evaluation designs during the planning phase of the teacher center program. This would make the total evaluation process an integral part of the overall teacher center program.

Resources

There are an abundance of excellent human and material resources available for teacher centers. To facilitate the role of the state as disseminator, teacher center personnel at the state level ought to be aware of these various resources. Additionally, states can offer quality technical assistance by being fully aware of the resources available to centers. States could facilitate this role by establishing resource files which are readily available to teacher center personnel. Several states have, through the National Institute of Education (NIE), established computerized resource/dissemination networks. These networks

maintain information on human and material resources covering a wide range of topics. The National Institute of Education also funds several regional research labs capable of supplying both human and material resources.

Perhaps the best sources of information for those interested in establishing teacher centers are existing teacher centers. The far West Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, located in San Francisco, California, publishes an excellent teacher center directory.

State departments of education should remind developing teacher centers of the various resources which lie within their respective local communities. The most important human resources are teachers who are capable of providing peer to peer coaching.

Existing Teacher Centers/Teacher Center Networks

Existing teacher centers can be looked upon as capable of providing valuable assistance to state departments of education. Their experiences in planning, establishing and operating centers ought to be disseminated by state departments to all developing teacher centers.

Teacher center networks which function on a National as well as on an individual state level could facilitate the exchange of information and resources between the various centers. The state department of education should play a vital linkage role in the establishments of such networks.

Public Law 94-482 (the teacher center program) limits the role of the state department of education in the provision of financial support to existing centers. Therefore, it is the states departments' obligation as a leader in this important movement to offer technical assistance and dissemination services to these existing centers.

Federally Funded Programs Related to Teacher Centers

State education agencies administer numerous federal and state programs which include funds designated for professional development. Comprehensive planning by the state agency could facilitate a coordinated thrust toward improved professional development programs.

An initial step in statewide comprehensive planning for professional development should involve the identification of these various federal and state funding sources.

The next step could involve the establishment of an intra-agency task force chaired by the state superintendent or his/her designate. This task force should include the directors of all programs which have professional development funds. Suggested activities for this task force may include the exploration of methods which foster economical, cooperative professional development activities at the local level. Another activity for this task force could involve activities which

encourage local education agencies to submit professional development plans detailing the amount of funds, by program areas, designed to provide continuous teacher inservice education. The following chart graphically suggests a possible state model for planning, establishing and implementing a comprehensive professional development plan.

Comprehensive State Plan for Professional Development

Identification of Federal and State funds designed for Professional Development	Establishment of an Intra-Agency Task Force
Publication and Support from LEAs	Development of a collaborative mechanism to provide directors of programs with inservice funds to plan joint activities
Pilot implementation of plan utilizing funds from several sources	Evaluation and feedback of pilot implementation
Full scale implementation of comprehensive plan	Adjustments based on evaluation
Evaluation	

Teacher Certification

Whether or not teacher certification should be formally tied to the teacher center program is an important issue. It is not the propose of the author to take a position for or against such a formal marriage. However, it is imperative that state departments consider the issue very carefully and utilize evaluation data from teacher centers to access, revitalize, and modify teacher certification procedures and requirements.

Summary

Educators at all levels ought to be apprised of the potentially positive impact of teacher-controlled professional development programs. The significance of this movement certainly deserves the wholehearted attention and support of state departments of education. If state departments of education want to play more than a peripheral role in this important movement, they must engage in bold, aggressive procedures in every phase of this emerging program.

"MOTIVATION AND KNOWLEDGE WE STRIVE TO RENDER,
IN THE LEARNING, RESOURCE TEACHER CENTER"

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